

AN ACT

RELATING TO THE FORFEITURE OF WATER RIGHTS; AMENDING CERTAIN SECTIONS OF THE NMSA 1978 PERTAINING TO WATER CONSERVATION PROGRAMS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

Section 1. Section 72-5-28 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1907, Chapter 49, Section 42, as amended) is amended to read:

"72-5-28. FAILURE TO USE WATER--FORFEITURE. --

A. When the party entitled to the use of water fails to beneficially use all or any part of the water claimed by him, for which a right of use has vested for the purpose for which it was appropriated or adjudicated, except the waters for storage reservoirs, for a period of four years, such unused water shall, if the failure to beneficially use the water persists one year after notice and declaration of nonuser given by the state engineer, revert to the public and shall be regarded as unappropriated public water; provided, however, that forfeiture shall not necessarily occur if circumstances beyond the control of the owner have caused nonuse, such that the water could not be placed to beneficial use by diligent efforts of the owner; and provided that periods of nonuse when irrigated farm lands are placed under the acreage reserve program or conservation reserve program provided by the Food Security Act of 1985,

P.L. 99-198 shall not be computed as part of the four-year forfeiture period; and provided, further, that the condition of notice and declaration of nonuser shall not apply to water which has reverted to the public by operation of law prior to June 1, 1965.

B. Upon application to the state engineer at any time and a proper showing of reasonable cause for delay or for nonuse or upon the state engineer finding that it is in the public interest, the state engineer may grant extensions of time, for a period not to exceed three years for each extension, in which to apply to beneficial use the water for which a permit to appropriate has been issued or a water right has vested, was appropriated or has been adjudicated.

C. Periods of nonuse when water rights are acquired by incorporated municipalities or counties for implementation of their water development plans or for preservation of municipal or county water supplies shall not be computed as part of the four-year forfeiture statute.

D. A lawful exemption from the requirements of beneficial use, either by an extension of time or other statutory exemption, stops the running of the four-year period for the period of the exemption, and the period of exemption shall not be included in computing the four-year period.

E. Periods of nonuse when the nonuser of acquired

water rights is on active duty as a member of the armed forces of this country shall not be included in computing the four-year period.

F. The owner or holder of a valid water right or permit to appropriate waters for agricultural purposes appurtenant to designated or specified lands may apply the full amount of water covered by or included in the water right or permit to any part of the designated or specified tract without penalty or forfeiture.

G. Periods of nonuse when water rights are acquired and placed in a state engineer-approved water conservation program, by an individual or entity that owns water rights, a conservancy district organized pursuant to Chapter 73, Articles 14 through 19 NMSA 1978, a soil and water conservation district organized pursuant to Chapter 73, Article 20 NMSA 1978, an acequia or community ditch association organized pursuant to Chapter 73, Article 2 or 3 NMSA 1978, an irrigation district organized pursuant to Chapter 73, Articles 9 through 13 NMSA 1978 or the interstate stream commission shall not be computed as part of the four-year forfeiture period."

Section 2. Section 72-12-8 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1931, Chapter 131, Section 8, as amended) is amended to read:

"72-12-8. WATER RIGHT FORFEITURE. --

A. When for a period of four years the owner of a

water right in any of the waters described in Sections 72-12-1 through 72-12-28 NMSA 1978 or the holder of a permit from the state engineer to appropriate any such waters has failed to apply them to the use for which the permit was granted or the right has vested, was appropriated or has been adjudicated, the water rights shall be, if the failure to beneficially use the water persists one year after notice and declaration of nonuser given by the state engineer, forfeited and the water so unused shall revert to the public and be subject to further appropriation; provided that the condition of notice and declaration of nonuser shall not apply to water which has reverted to the public by operation of law prior to June 1, 1965.

B. Upon application to the state engineer at any time and a proper showing of reasonable cause for delay or for nonuse or upon the state engineer finding that it is in the public interest, the state engineer may grant extensions of time, for a period not to exceed three years for each extension, in which to apply to beneficial use the water for which a permit to appropriate has been issued or a water right has vested, was appropriated or has been adjudicated.

C. Periods of nonuse when irrigated farm lands are placed under the acreage reserve program or conservation reserve program provided by the Food Security Act of 1985, P.L. 99-198 shall not be computed as part of the four-year

forfeiture period.

D. Periods of nonuse when water rights are acquired and placed in a state engineer-approved water conservation program by an individual or entity that owns water rights, an artesian conservancy district, conservancy district, a soil and water conservation district organized pursuant to Chapter 73, Article 20 NMSA 1978, an acequia or community ditch association organized pursuant to Chapter 73, Article 2 or 3 NMSA 1978, an irrigation district organized pursuant to Chapter 73, Articles 9 through 13 NMSA 1978 or the interstate stream commission shall not be computed as part of the four-year forfeiture statute.

E. A lawful exemption from the requirements of beneficial use, either by an extension of time or other statutory exemption, stops the running of the four-year period for the period of the exemption, and the period of exemption shall not be included in computing the four-year period.

F. Periods of nonuse when water rights are acquired by incorporated municipalities or counties for implementation of their water development plans or for preservation of municipal or county water supplies shall not be computed as part of the four-year forfeiture statute.

G. Periods of nonuse when the nonuser of acquired water rights is on active duty as a member of the armed

forces of this country shall not be included in computing the four-year period.

H. The owner or holder of a valid water right or permit to appropriate waters for agricultural purposes appurtenant to designated or specified lands may apply the full amount of water covered by or included in that water right or permit to any part of the designated or specified tract without penalty or forfeiture."